



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

NEWS RELEASE

JACK O'CONNELL

State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

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State Schools Chief Jack O'Connell Announces the Distribution of Personal Protective Equipment to Help Schools Combat Flu Emergency

SAN RAFAEL, CA – State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell today announced a multiagency effort to distribute millions of protective masks and gloves to schools throughout California to help prevent and mitigate the spread of the H1N1 influenza virus and other influenza outbreaks.

"We want to keep students, teachers, and staff healthy and in school," O'Connell said. "In order to prevent the spread of disease, the federal H1N1 guidance for schools calls for the use of personal protective equipment in situations in which a student becomes ill while on campus. Thanks to federal grant funding, we can provide masks and gloves called for in the guidance to schools free of charge. Procuring and distributing this personal protective equipment for use in California public schools is truly a statewide effort that required the help and generosity of our county offices of education, several state agencies, and private shipping companies. I want to thank all of the partners in this effort who are helping to protect the health of our students and school staff."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Department of Education jointly issued guidance for schools regarding the H1N1 influenza pandemic. The guidance stresses that the best way to prevent the spread of viruses is by staying home if you are sick, covering your coughs and sneezes, washing or sanitizing your hands frequently, and getting the flu vaccines if possible.

The guidance also recommends the use of personal protective equipment in situations when a student becomes ill while at school. The guidance states that students who appear to have influenza-like illness should be sent to a supervised sick room

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separate from others until they can leave the school campus. CDC recommends that the ill person wear a surgical mask, if they can tolerate it. The CDC guidance also recommends that school nurses or other school staff who are caring for ill students should wear gloves and a respirator face mask, commonly known as an N95 respirator.

For more guidelines, please visit <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools/schoolguidance.htm>.

“Making sure federal grant money goes to where it’s supposed to is one of the Governor’s and Cal EMA’s top priorities,” said Matt Bettenhausen, Secretary of the California Emergency Management Agency (Cal EMA). “I’m extremely pleased we were able to work with Superintendent O’Connell and all our partners in the public and private sectors to help ensure the health and safety of our students.”

Cal EMA received two federal grants totaling nearly \$2.5 million to purchase more than 23 million masks and gloves for California schools. One grant was used to purchase respirator masks and gloves, and to ship the supplies to 58 county offices of education and the Los Angeles Unified School District. The other grant funds were used to purchase the ear loop surgical masks. However federal rules regarding that grant did not allow the funds to be used for shipping the ear loop masks out to the education field. To ensure that the supplies were actually distributed to public schools, the California Department of General Services recruited private companies to pay for shipping the ear loop masks to all 58 County Offices of Education and the Los Angeles Unified School District. The private companies that provided shipping free of charge are FedEx Corporation, Golden State Overnight, Mountain Valley Express, Inc., and OnTrac.

“It is a pleasure to be part of a tremendous public and private sector partnership to secure the masks and gloves needed to protect California's schools against the H1N1 virus,” said Department of General Services (DGS) Acting Director Ron Diedrich. “I’m pleased that the DGS Procurement team was able to quickly step up to meet the pressing needs of our clients at the Department of Education and Cal EMA.”

Superintendents at each of California’s 58 county offices of education agreed to receive the shipments and distribute all the personal protective equipment to districts and charter schools within their jurisdiction. The ear loop masks have already been

distributed to all 58 county offices of education. The respirators and gloves will be distributed after shipments of the supplies arrive some time between mid- to late-December. Marin County Superintendent of Schools Mary Jane Burke believes the free supplies of protective equipment can help provide an important measure of safety for school communities.

“One of the highest priorities of the Marin County Office of Education is protecting the health and safety of our Marin school community,” said Burke. “We are most appreciative of the support and assistance from the California Department of Education, California Emergency Management Agency, and the Department of General Services in distributing personal protective equipment to help prevent the spread of H1N1 influenza in our schools.”

The federal government proclaimed a public health emergency earlier this year following outbreaks of the nonseasonal and H1N1 flu viruses in Mexico and the United States. The Governor followed suit and proclaimed a State of Emergency on April 28 in California. This paved the way for state agencies to acquire the masks and gloves. For schools seeking more information and guidance on the flu and H1N1 viruses, please visit <http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/re/ht/yr09h1n1.asp>.

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The California Department of Education is a state agency led by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell. The core purpose of CDE is to lead and support the continuous improvement of student achievement, with a specific focus on closing achievement gaps. For more information, please visit <http://www.cde.ca.gov> or by mobile device at <http://m.cde.ca.gov/>. You may also follow Superintendent O'Connell (@SSPIJack) on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/sspijack>.